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Directed by: Robert Watson. Pp.

This thesis is a collection of poems written during the past few years. They are not arranged in the order of completion; neither are they arranged in the order of conception. There is a deliberate arrangement to the poems; however, it may have significance only in the mind of the author. Any philosophies suspected of being expounded in the poetry are not necessarily those philosophies ingrained in the poet. Rather, they are more often than not, variant and sometimes divergent alternatives which have come under the poet's consideration at different times during the composition process.

4

First Directions
"

by

Robert G. Davidson
"

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
1971

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Acknowledgements

Rather than patronizing specific persons, I would like to acknowledge in progressive degrees of gratitude depending upon the intensity of their influence, all those who have involved either my time or my thinking, especially those of the latter group. A greatest indebtedness goes to those who have loved me or troubled me, and to those who have directed and encouraged my writing.

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A Prenatal Biography

When the bomb plummeted, detonated, then mushroomed,
And the second did the same (but a bit off target),
Their brilliance flashed across the coldest Pacific
And competed with the Northern Lights in intensity only.
Their tidal wave washed to the Pole, and in its re-course,
Swept over the Aleutian Islands and my father-to-be,
Bringing him back to the Pennsylvania mills and his lover.
Nearly two years later, after the pills,
My underweight form was squeezed and pulled into a world
Whose first impression on it was yellow jaundice.

First Sex

under the rear porch steps candles shadowing

They told me all about it

the big kids

with my bravest leer

"Ya gimme a puff Can't wait"

But secretly didn't believe them

at least didn't want to

a lack of courage and thoughts of the priesthood

like a middle-aged cousin

But no good either--

the desire for fatherhood already pressing

searching for that big courage

for maybe just once or twice

And found in a grandfather

Who did it nineteen times

With two wives

Reexamined Childhood Memories:

A Poem in Three Parts

1.

Junk Yard

Three midnight explorers
Sneaking to disturb the quiet
Of some junk:
We avoid the reach
Of alley lamps
And yelps
Of occasional dog pens;
Stashing our poles
With the cans of worms
Behind the hedgerow,
We cautiously scale
The chain-link fence.

Among our haven
Of punctured oil pans
And long-still hulks,
We search for the tires.
Bodily measuring the trunk
Of a Coupe de Ville

Or watching the half moon
Through the cracked windshield,
We eventually find the tire
In the decaying bed
Of a pickup.

 In the storm gully,
A second one dug free
With a bent hub cap.
As usual, we make
Our closing inspection
Of the school bus
Where we finger
The blood stains
And try our seats again.
A distant bark
From the watchdog
And we roll our tires
To the river's bank
Where they will provide
Light and warmth
For our night fishing.

2.

Night Fishing

The flaming tires consume themselves with an intensity
That seems to protest their misuse,
While we peer into the fog that piles down the valley
Without any apparent intent or purpose.
The September night air chills our shore
That was the bed in prehistoric ages,
And even the ugly catfish won't bite anymore.
We hardly mind the fishes' reluctance;
Neither do we notice the tires' stench
As we squat below the opposite, steeper bank
Where the Indian caves still watch.
They look out from their darkness at the junk
Which we stone, just before it swirls the bend
And crosses the moon-shadow of the bridge.

3.

Barge Pusher

Shoving its ore barges up the midnight river,
The plodding vessel burns the water
With its running lights and search beam.
Never being seen to return to where it has been,
It spreads its wake while we fish from the land
And occasionally wonder where it is bound.

One Week Job

push-up, ice pop, or rainbow bar: 10¢

Two stainless steel, vault-like doors entrance/exit
 sun's reflection outside,
 shining warm days and local swimming pools;
 dim, bare bulb frost inside
 I breathe steam breath at piles of popsicles,
 stack drumsticks, seventy-two hernia dozen per package,
 push fudgesicle-filled carts
 damn twine wound around flat coasters!

ice cream sandwich, cones, or frozen eclair: 15¢

Thermal underwear but a summer cold anyway
 minus forty degree running snot
 What reason for Arctic gloves and numb toes
 at two dollars an hour?
 just to keep dingling white trucks' guts full
 to stuff quarter, "Where's-my-change?" suburb kids
 A belly full of this shit!
 frozen shit

sundaes--chocolate, strawberry, or butterscotch: 20¢

Love

Moving that way,
She undulated into the room,
Inundating it with her presence;
Hugging her books
Like a Saturday night lover,
Cloth bag dangling from one finger--
Swaying in perfect rhythm
To her solid, churning behind;
Throbbing breasts sucking in and out--
Rounding to the rhythm,
As her jaw marked time for it all
On the Wrigley's Spearmint.
Caught, I stared hard
One of those looks
That could never be ignored;
Fixed to her movements
As she swung past
In that lovely combination
Of interrelated motions;
Stared, as she riffled
A copy of Mademoiselle;
Watched, as she slid into a chair;
Smiled, when from under her brow,
She looked back through a fashioned eye--

Cracked her gum--

Winked!

Then I was assured that tonight

We would lie on her long brown hair,

Call each other beautiful,

And promise our sincerest love.

Helen Carey's Local Board Picnic

Spread the blankets and sprawl

On the grass girls, plenty of room,

Just a few stones in the way.

The sun's big and hot; awfully hot...

So it's O.K. to throw your shawls

Over the crosses--public property,

You know, we own them.

Something to eat: Martha, the cake,

And Mary, you brought the wine?

Beaujolais. The man said it
would be nice.

Red's nice.

Open it! Open it!

bony hands spilling a little, but there's more, always

more; slicing through the cake--icing lips and crumb-

dropped laps, while sad, blank-eyed angels stare down,

single arms held out--beckoning, pointing, accusing

But I know a card trick. Pick a card,

Any card, and I'll tell you what it is.

The trick's old; you've been
doing it for years.

Then a game of tag. Flagpole's safe,

And no climbing on the cannons.

But first some wine. Open another bottle!

beaujolais streaming down thin chins, filling the
neck wrinkles

Some more cake! Who brought

The cookies?

crotchety tag among the monuments

White crosses make

Such nice, even aisles.

Helen! Stop swinging on the
flagpole!

Slurp some wine, beaujolais. Splash

It on the stone-faced angel--

I baptize thee in the name of the

Father... Hobble tag Smashed flowers

Come on, pick a card S'more wine

No tab-backs Rows, rows, white,

Round-and-round everything going

Round and round Drinking Angels upside

Down Red cheeks Stained grass Beckoning

Pickacard

Navigating the Point

The Ohio, long feeling your wake slap
Against its mill-lined banks,
Neville Island far behind; now within
The fog, lights depict buildings where
There had been a faint blur. Swing larboard,
Your course is not the Mon tonight.
How much Ohio has already folded under
Your lead barges, beyond sight and low
With sand? Four more deep with ore--
Six causing little drain on your power,
The diesel driving its pulse through
The water and mist for all the valley
To feel. Surging toward the Manchester
Still invisible in the fog moving on
The water, you search left. Your beam
Fixes on the stone tower. A darting probe
Toward the right and its twin support
Has kept good distance. Your stack coughs
Its exhaust to warm the bridge's underbelly,
And you've entered the Allegheny.
Your horn's blast flies up the valley
To alert the shore people of your success,
And shout your coming.

Joseph Sulenski

We read your books, Andrew Carnegie,
and weed our grandfathers' graves

Thirty-seven years in the mills, four hours into the turn,
Joseph Sulenski has been there long enough
To sweep up, be laid off, bid on jobs, lose a finger,
And become number one furnace helper.
curse the furnace and push the buttons to make the steel--
three hundred tons in a heat

The electric hum of four furnaces dictating
The smoke and dust, lights on highlifts
Looking like runabouts in a fog;
Satanic cooker doing its job, shaking the building,
Yet the brew needs an addition.
push the button to pivot the lid--
two hundred ton crane dangling overhead

Ore sliding from the scoop, splashing white-hot steel,
Quick drifting, and settling like soft clay;
Temperature in the vat lowering;
The heat needs prodding.
push the button to close the lid--
preparing to charge the furnace

Three telephone pole sized electrodes descending
To jolt life into the metal creation.

A red knob exciting the electrodes,
Thunder echoing down the department,
And the heat reaching its tap temperature;
Electrodes dragging out of the fetal
Bridges and buildings.

push the button to swing the lid--
red glow dawning on the black ceiling

Pulling the lever with both hands,
Hydraulic jacks lifting one side of the furnace,
Phlegethon pouring from the other;
In the thimble, a steel puddle growing into a steel lake;
The drained furnace glowing like a jack-o-lantern
Through its steel door.

Sirens sound as the craneman hooks onto the thimble
And raises it above the workers' heads;
Steel splashing but a few inches from the brim,
And the cold sweat craneman remembers two years ago
When the thimble tipped, white waterfalling steel
That disappeared three men.

Slowing to a row of ingot molds on flatcars,
The thimble hovers above the first one,

And when steady, is tapped to spout
A narrow white glow from its bottom.
But when an attempt is made to halt the flow,
It splatters through the broken nozzle
And frightened shouts of "Running pour!"
Send men scattering for shelter.
The craneman, trying to save the steel,
Hurries to the second mold,
Running steel down one mold, across the flatcar,
Up the side of the second mold--
The same all the way down the line.
Like splashed wax, steel hardening
On the molds, cars, couplings, tracks,
And puddled on the sand floor.

Slumping on the four cinder block-two plank
bench between his locker and the furnace,
pulling off grease soaked, steel-toed boots
and tying several year old oxfords,
exchanging a three days wear T-shirt
for a button missing sports shirt,
tossing a hard hat on the shelf
and dusting off a favorite fishing cap,
Joseph Sulenski becomes the man
his children see coming up the walk.

Hopes and Ambitions

From childhood days in a land with a history,
To Ellis Island and the city, then southward,
Two Greek sisters feel the diminishing distance
In their predetermined race with death.
Behind their bar, they set them up and wash them out,
Give advice and confession-like,
Listen to their mens' problems.
On the top of their blank television,
They concern themselves in arranging an altar
Of holy cards and a jig-saw puzzle Christ.
A rosary hanging from the door frame protects their room,
Votive candles pulsating the curtain red.
Beneath a plastic poinsettia,
Dry marigolds catch the cooking fumes
As a plate of hard-boiled eggs cools.
Twenty-four and they tell us,
 You boys write your mamas. Don't mess with
 bar girls. Too smart. Don't drink too much,
 but if you need a beer, come back.

The Man

The second night of trouble
And my out-of-state tags
Attract the siren and blue beacon;
Alternating me blue and darkness,
I can see them in the mirror
Hiding their heads in the slick helmets.
They bring their dog,
All three closing on the mirror
Like surrealistic park strollers.
Too close to the window view,
All that can be seen
Is the middle section
Of the first man:
The bullets--his grin,
The revolver--his sex,
The badge--his eye.
Masturbating,
The blue-blue, blue-blue cyclops
Speaks from the unseen:
"Just a routine check."
And you hope that his self-control
Is as strong as the anchor chain
That holds his shepherd.

Jennette's Fishing Pier, Nags Head

The pier, reaching into the ocean's wetness,
Violating her in the darkness

All night for just twenty-five cents
And she, unable to control herself
Responds with stroking waves, waves, waves,
Lapping beneath postcards and pinball machines.
Below, a skate moves like a blowing patch of cloth,
Rippling through its mistress until fed a hook
And pulled to the reach of an arc light.
No longer easy folds, but a flip-flop struggle.

Yahoo, a skate! Look at this, a motha-fuckin' skate!
Belly creased by railing, tatooed arm winding Yahoo!
Slightly twitching skate revolving on the line's end,
Swung over the railing.
Deflated billows spread smooth, hugging the pier boards
When the heel bangs through its head;
A second time the hollow death sound of heel
Meeting planks echoes off the waves.

Any else y'all catch a skate 'en ya' walk home!

Yahoo

Sea brains slipping between the wood,
Dripping on the ocean.

First Snow South

Cold rain sleet to snow

The first fall late to me flaking post-Christmas

Blunts edges softens hards brightens dull

Myself North and packed with snow experience

like the two day snow on playgrounds

observe with disdain

the ineffectual efforts to peel the thin snow sheet

into workable mounds

Watch the desecration of respectable sledding

and think back to snowmen with preponderance

toboggan runs and stranded cars

Greed

Shadow of McTeague, fists once hard as wooden mallets,
Trudges always the purgatory of Death Valley--
Wrist handcuffed to the dead form of Marcus,
Clutching his sack of gold and laughing at the dry canary
Tumbling across the floor of its prison--
Gilt cage that pulls heavy at McTeague's arm, rings,
Clanging against the dusty rocks and startles to life
The stone pug dog that perks its head and blinks,
Staring at the prisoners through waving haze of alkali--
Heat that calls to McTeague's mind Sunday steam beer
And porcelain pipe fulls of cheap tobacco,
But the pipe's unpiecable fragments scattered with
The torn pages of seven carefully studied volumes
Of "Allen's Practical Dentist" and other artifacts of life,
Including the steel Medici Court, whose occupants,
Half covered with sand, hear, as does McTeague,
The pawned concertina's six lugubrious airs,
And watches the men with the stone dog trailing,
Drive each other toward the monstrous gilded molar
Glinting in the foothills which will never be attained.

The Race Watchers

Like antennae,
the cars and rigs string out in either direction from the
overturned auto.

Shouting "Jump you son of a bitch! Jump!
I'm on my lunch hour,"
the watchers come running on their stiff legs
with their white heads bobbing,
or with their hurried, mincing steps,
or with their youthful brashness.

Milling about the ridiculous vehicle, they ask,
"Is she alive?"

Yes, there is life,
but their stares pierce the exposed underparts
and dry the squirming within.

The Prisoners

Lovely girls; bright women, brown-haired, black-haired, and gray; youths; stalwart men and old; gentle born and peasant born; all red wine for La Guillotine, all daily brought into light from the dark cellars of the loathsome prisons, and carried to her through the streets to slake her devouring thirst. Liberty, equality, fraternity, or death--the last, much the easiest to bestow, O Guillotine!

They are collectively fenced
With a minimum of notice,
And at considerably less expense
Than a grazing stud bull.

Each working day of the week
They are early awakened
To face the cynically rosy cheek
Of April springtime's cold dawn.

In the minutes allotted, they gulp their meal
And are coldly presented
The numeraled hunting jackets which feel
So tight across their thin backs.

Trucked down the highway
 In their little yellow box,
 They sit facing one another, but may
 Look out the chicken cooped back door.

Now you can see them, and they can see you.

You hear the whisper made by the downward track
 of their bush ax,
 And fear the throbbing chain that rattles
 between you.

You regret their pendulum approach
 And erect signs around your medieval towns--

No Prison Labor
 Beyond This Point

as if they are not there
 if you cannot see them

Lock your windows and doors!
 Hide in your closets and cupboards!
 You have become the runaway slaves
 Who must now hide in the caves
 Of whatever devising
 Keeps you from realizing
 That the hunters are your sufferers.

Arrangements and Eccentricities

When the State's pre-highway bulldozer
 nudged a corner of the added room,
The Muse trembled within the floor boards
 and paneling;
 felt the vibrations but clung tightly
 within the window frames and bookless shelves.

When the dozer found a gripping place
 and pushed the room askew,
The Muse scrambled;
 shouted its unheard protests
 against the louder growl of the machine.

When the machine lifted with its scoop,
 straining on its treads,
 the walls folded into each other
 and the chandelier crashed on the heap.
The Muse, jarred from its nestling places,
 was scattered about the dust
 and began a search for a new room's
 arrangement in which to settle.

A Precarious Situation

Engrossed in a tug-a-war

With a taut worm,

Sometimes the black and red

Flutter of a robin

Is crumpled calm

By the pounce of a tom.

To Embrace All Knowledge

Yes unclaimed woman
 nodding consent to all that you know
 everything
 Ponder and nodding for those that you hold so dear--
 Chaucer and Shakespeare
 and Wordsworth
 and Eliot and Ezra
 and great white whales
 Yessing an intimacy for Sonnets from the Portuguese
 and hieroglyphic like seeming lines
 written in Greek
 knowing very little of what they speak
 How grandioso
 to nod quick staccato
 for Faust and Mephisto
 and translate from the German
 passages of Gerhart Hauptmann
 Sneezing and wheezing over mildewed collections
 in third story rooms
 Embracing the scribblings and ink splatters
 of second rate writers
 whose names you collect

Nodding and yessing over small printed pages

whose words accumulate

to develop your beautiful intellect

Beautiful Intellect,

Look carefully into Chapman's Homer,
but also nod the opportunity
to witness the Pacific's wide breadth.

Points of Intersection

Imperceptible to the ancient, lagging drake,
An unspectacular feather broke free
And drifted to every chilling breaths' mercy;
Dragging behind it an airy wake,
The wisp at last impaled on the thistle
Of some leafless hedge, that in growing, came
To meet it sure beside a backwoods lane.

On this mirthless, initial day of school,
Discovered by the backward looking boy
With the pencils and freshly pressed clothing
While at his early morning wandering;
A last reminder of the summer day
He spent observing the ducks of the pond gather,
Secluded within the circle of tall fir.

Circus Train

Zip-zap

Clickety-clack,

Quick flowing stream

Of stripes and dots

In yellows and green,

Reds and blues;

Streaking before

The shutter snap

Of horizon-lodged

Twilight sun.

GREATEST GREATEST GREATEST GREATEST

SHOW SHOW SHOW SHOW

First time

Last time

This time

It's real!

Seen so many times ago

In films and children's picture books.

Seasonal Haikus

Fall

Tinted leaves that break,
Then sift toward their beginnings,
Anoint ripe soil.

Winter

Goldfish ponds that freeze
And sparrows grubbing for crumbs;
Christmas rose warms them.

Spring

First southern robin
And the scented hyacinth;
Moist expectations.

Summer

Mist-lifting mornings
That dry into afternoons;
Feelings of always.

Fall - Whistling

Tinted leaves...

From the Mountain Top

From the mountain top,
A quiet hawk
Is watched
Gliding an easy design
On the pines.

Inherent
As his resplendent swirls
May be,
It is comforting
To marvel
What spurred him from the cover
Of his verdure,
Leaping to sweep
The untried border
Of his reach.